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SUBJECT: STEINMEIER'S OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: A two-page open letter from German Foreign Minister Steinmeier to President-elect Barack Obama was published over the weekend of January 10-11 in Der Spiegel magazine. Steinmeier wrote that an incoming American president has never stimulated "so much hope and confidence," and he welcomed Obama's stated willingness to work closely with allies to shape a common future. In the letter, Steinmeier broached a number of foreign policy issues that he hopes to work on in coordination with the incoming administration, including Guantanamo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Russia. (See para. 5 for full translation). End summary.

¶2. (U) In the open letter, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier welcomes Obama's pledge to close Guantanamo and says that the new Administration should not be "left in a lurch" by the international community and Europe in dealing with the inmates. He encourages Obama to stick to his pledge to engage Iran in direct dialogue, arguing that doing so is "neither a weakness nor a concession." On Iraq, he announces that Germany, notwithstanding its opposition to the war, is ready to increase its assistance in rebuilding the country, especially in the health care and education sectors. He notes that he will soon visit Iraq to, among other things, review possible projects.

¶3. (U) On Afghanistan, Steinmeier notes that Germany has increased its engagement, but emphasizes the need to "gradually" transfer responsibility to the Afghans for taking care of their own security. In resolving conflicts in Afghanistan and elsewhere, Steinmeier plays down the role of military force: "I am convinced that the strongest military battalions alone cannot defeat terror and hatred. Peace is only possible when we convince people of a better alternative to hostility and violence."

¶4. (U) On Russia, Steinmeier urges taking President Medvedev "at his word" that he is committed to modernizing Russia and pursuing a partnership with the West. He also encourages the new Administration to be open to discussing Medvedev's proposal for a new European security architecture. Steinmeier calls for a new Harmel report on the future orientation of NATO, saying that an "honest discussion" of NATO enlargement policy has been put off for "too long." On CFE, he argues that the treaty must be "urgently reformed and preserved." He pushes for Russia and the U.S. to make further progress on nuclear arms reductions in order to be able to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Finally, he strongly supports the enlargement of the G8, arguing that today's global problems (as exemplified by the financial crisis) could only be solved by integrating the new rising powers in the coordination group.

¶5. (U) Below is the complete translation of the open letter:

Spiegel, January 12, 2009

"Standing Shoulder to Shoulder"

Open letter from Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Barack Obama

Dear Barack Obama,

Last year in July, hundreds of thousands of people gathered

at Victory Column in Berlin to hear your vision of a better America and a more peaceful world. Your words fascinated millions of people watching on TV. You reawakened the American Dream, for which countless people all over the world have been admiring your country for more than 200 years. For a society that has the power to change. That is open to new ideas. And that gives brave people the space to take their lives into their own hands.

In a few days, you will be the 44th U.S. President. I am now 53 years old, and never in my active memory has the inauguration of an American president sparked so much hope and optimism. The expectations of you are almost beyond any human dimension. And the challenges that will confront you from Day One are enormous: a financial system that is still shaky, an economy on its way into recession, a world that feels insecure, a world that is changing.

An impossible task? In any case, one that demands courage, circumspection, and steadfastness. And certainly a new way of thinking that questions outdated ideas and searches out new ways.

Your campaign was exciting. You filled the people in the U.S. and far beyond with enthusiasm for venturing into a new future. You are planning to act in partnership and to dare new things. That is why what we see most in the beginning of your presidency are opportunities. Especially now. And also for us.

The challenges that we face are enormous: creating a transparent and reliable architecture for the world financial system. Combating the economic crisis. Reforming global institutions. Building new trust between East and West. Building bridges between cultures and religions that know little about each other. Peace and new prospects where, today, crises dominate. Efficient measures against climate change. Global disarmament instead of the proliferation of more and more dangerous weapons. All this can only be achieved together. No country in the world, and be it the most powerful one, can solve even one of these problems on its own.

"Together" -- that means: the United States and Europe standing shoulder to shoulder. During the Cold War, West Germans benefited from America's commitment to freedom and democracy. Together, we enthusiastically celebrated the fall of the Wall. After that, it was too often daily routine that dominated our relations. Sometimes in the past years, I was worried that our ties could develop rifts. But we must not become indifferent to each other, especially now. In a world that has become more confusing, we need a new intensity in our cooperation. Together, we can also shape the world of the 21st century -- if we start out courageously; if we place the central issues of humanity at the center; and if, together, we find answers to the questions of the future. Let us write a new "transatlantic agenda" and fill it with life.

1A. Working Together for Stability in the Conflict Regions

Finding partners, doing away with a "them versus us" mentality -- nothing is more important in a world in which radical forces still abuse religious and cultural differences to fuel hatred. Of course, nobody can tolerate the fact that extremists threaten the foundations of our society with violence and terror. Every nation has the responsibility to defend its values, the security and safety of its citizens. But no fight, even a fight against terror, should be allowed to erode our own achievements of civilization, to compromise democracy or the rule of law. That is why I am pleased that you are planning to close Guantanamo. One of the most difficult questions with regard to this is what will happen to the detainees there. If America approaches others, I recommend that the international community of states and Europe not abandon the new Administration in this task.

I am convinced: Nobody can defeat terror and hate with the

strongest military battalions alone. Peace will only be possible if we can convince people of a better alternative to hostility and violence. If we succeed in winning their hearts and minds. If we help make economic development and prospects for their lives possible to guide people out of poverty. And if we engage in dialog, even and especially where it is difficult.

Because economic and political weights in the world are shifting, we can take our Western values less and less for granted. Rather, we need to advocate them, we need to build bridges. We need to generate mutual understanding. A policy of isolation, a policy that draws dividing lines -- that is, in the end, a policy of weakness. Those who act in this way show that they are not as sure of their values as they say. I firmly believe that our common values are strong enough to be convincing in a dialogue.

Especially in the broader Middle East. Recent events in Gaza show how quickly the small steps of progress on the way to peace are endangered yet again. There is no doubt: the Middle East issue should be at the top of your administration's priorities. We will offer close cooperation on this. Because more than ever it is true: only dialogue and cooperation, not suicide attacks and Qassam missiles will lead to enduring peace. New trust and stability in the Middle East can only grow in a system that includes all important players in the region.

This can have its limitations, as we can see in Iran. Of course, dialogue only makes sense if the interlocutor also wants to see a result. Cooperation will be impossible without the willingness to comply with internationally respected rules. That is why the international community has very concrete and non-negotiable commitments it expects from Tehran: no support for terror and violence in the region, no development of nuclear weapons. But still: to offer to enter into dialogue with Iran is neither a show of weakness nor a concession. It is sensible. That is why I would like to encourage you and your team to pursue this path as you announced.

Stability in this region will also be decided in Iraq. It was for good reason that you were against the war six years ago, just as I was. Today we have to look ahead together and help the people in Iraq build up a stable and democratic state. My country will increase its contribution, especially in the areas of health care and education. I will shortly travel to Iraq to see exactly where and how we can do that.

Together with you, we are also fighting for a future for Afghanistan. You have announced more troops, but also more engagement for reconstruction. We are also committed to a comprehensive approach to building peace. We must gradually help the Afghans to get to the point where they can guarantee security in their country on their own. That is why we have again stepped up our (military) support. But building roads, schools and water pipes is just as important. This, too, is our shared priority.

11B. For A Common Security in East and West

Twenty years of great plans for a pan-European order of peace and for a common security zone circling the Northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, followed the end of the Cold War. But, unfortunately, we have far from having achieved this objective. It is not only the thought patterns of the Cold War that continue to prevail in the shadows of the past. The thoughts of this era also seem to be rooted in some minds. Distrust is dominant instead of trust and (a commitment to) common action for the future.

Dear Barack Obama, you are a member of a new generation. You were 28 years old when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and you have been shaped less by the categories of the Cold War than your predecessors. Quite the contrary: you said in your speech in Berlin that those categories would need to be overcome and that we should work to build a partnership that

comprises the entire continent -- including Russia.

Let us take Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at his word. He, too, is a member of a new generation; he is four years younger than you are. He has also made proposals. Let us talk about what a renewed security architecture could look like. Let us think about new structures for the new global era without expecting to reach results immediately. And without calling into question the stable foundation of our security in the past decades: we will also need NATO in the future. But we have for too long postponed honest discussions about responsibilities and instead focused on enlargement and enlargement issues. Today, we need a new basic understanding regarding the alliance's future alignment -- something like a new "Harmel Report" with which NATO gave itself a new orientation 40 years ago in a critical phase.

As a first concrete step, we must regain lost trust, for example through joint disarmament initiatives. The CFE Treaty on the reduction of conventional weapons urgently has to be reformed and preserved. We also need movement on nuclear disarmament, on the Russian as well as the American side. Only when Russia and the U.S. lead the way will we be in a position to effectively fight the uncontrolled proliferation of nuclear weapons. My impression is that you are thinking in this direction in a very focused way. Please know that we will also be a partner on this issue.

1C. For a Global Partnership in Responsibility

We live in times in which the distribution of global power is shifting. New powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America are striving to enter the world stage. They will reduce the relative weight of the U.S. and the West. The world of the future will have many voices. It has to be our task to see to it that the result will not be a Babylonian babble.

We will only solve the central problems of humanity if we are able to let new powers take on global responsibilities, by reliably integrating them into a new order. Only if they are represented at the table as equals will they be willing to accept global rules.

The financial summit in Washington was a new beginning in that regard. The most important "old" and "new" powers worked together to develop the framework of a new global financial order.

I am committed to us further pursuing this path -- far beyond financial questions. We must be smart in enlarging the group of the eight most important industrialized nations and integrating new emerging powers into a new community of responsibility.

The global era requires new thinking. Every person, every nation bears responsibility. Not just locally and nationally

-- but also for the world we all share. For example in climate protection. Let us take your country. Only if the United States is actively involved will the negotiations for a new climate protection agreement after 2012 be successful. That is why we are placing great hope and expectations in the change of direction in energy and climate policy that you have announced for your country: to move away from oil toward renewable energies and more energy efficiency. I think the time has come for a close energy and climate partnership across the Atlantic. Politically, but also through developing new technologies together. In climate protection, too, we can achieve the most progress when we work together.

1D. "Change has come to America"

Who does not recall your moving victory speech on the night of your election victory? Like no other person, you stand for change and a new beginning in your country. For social and environmental modernization. For more opportunities through education. For a more just health system. For a society

that leaves no one behind. For determined action in a time of crisis. For this reason, many people in the whole world feel close to you, also here in Germany.

"And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores... our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared..." on Election Night, this was a message not just to America, but to the entire world: let us work together to shape our common future.

A message that we were happy to hear! We are looking forward to cooperating with you and your Secretary of State.
Welcome, President Obama!

Sincerely,

Frank-Walter Steinmeier

END TEXT

Koenig